



Testimony of
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Education Committee Hearing
March 14, 2018

SB 455 An Act Concerning Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Senator Boucher, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Jan Hochadel. I have been a teacher in the Connecticut Technical High School System and am the President of AFT Connecticut, a diverse state federation of more than 90 local unions representing more than 30,000 public and private sector employees. Our members include more than 15,000 teachers, paraprofessionals, school nurses and other school personnel across the state.

Diversity within our schools provides students with rich opportunities to learn from peers of different racial, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. We should embrace diversity and the learning experiences it provides so that all children can be successful in our global society. It's not enough to have diverse student bodies, however. We must also work to ensure that Connecticut's educators are representative of the students and communities they serve so that all children have positive role models from a variety of backgrounds. Although minority students account for over a third of Connecticut's public-school students, only 7 percent of the state's teachers are minorities.

SB 455 takes important steps to correct this problem, especially section 1 (4), which seeks to "modernize the process for educators to obtain professional certification by eliminating obstacles to certification by eliminating obstacles to certification." We believe there are practical, common sense steps we can take to encourage people of color who want to become teachers to earn their certifications.

Connecticut has a workforce of paraeducators who have demonstrated their commitment to improve student learning and have shown the skills and abilities necessary in education. AFT Connecticut is proud to represent paraeducators in over 40 districts throughout Connecticut. The percentage of paraeducators of color is significantly higher than that of teachers. We are asking the State to investigate an individualized, accelerated track for paraeducators to become teachers, which will recognize their classroom experience.

Our teachers and paraeducators in Hartford are ensuring students see their community represented by their teachers. They have worked with AFT Connecticut and the Hartford Board of Education to sign a Memorandum of Understanding that partners with Relay to certify our paraeducators as teachers. Once they become certified teachers and teach in the district for two years, they will receive \$1800 to help defray the cost of the Relay program. We applaud this important first step, but to address a problem of this significance we must do more.

Our State colleges can offer an individualized, accelerated program of study for paraeducators that recognizes their classroom experiences while still providing a high-quality education required to transition from

paraeducators to teachers. As in the Hartford model, we can require a minimum number of years to teach in the district for their loans to be forgiven. We recognize that in our current financial situation, the State may be unwilling to take on any additional financial obligations. For that reason, we are first asking for a study to examine the financial benefits and costs of such a program. We believe when we look at the increased income taxes paid by these paraeducators over time, the investment will pay for itself many times over. Moreover, addressing the achievement gap is a moral and economic imperative for our state moving forward. We believe that the following organizations should be at the table to help look at data and work on this program; President of the CT State Colleges and Universities, Education Deans at the State Universities, Commissioner of Education, teachers, paraeducators, NAACP, AFT and CEA Representatives and the Commission on Equity and Opportunity, Education Committee co-chairs and/or members. This program would not solve the issue, but it is an important first step to provide all our children an education that reflects their experiences and needs.

Thank you.